



# VISION YOUTH DEVOTIONAL

Term 2, 2020

Volume 3



# Day 1 - Firmly Planted

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Read: Mark 4:1-20; Psalm 1  
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If you are going to the effort of planting something, you want it to be healthy, to be well established and to grow. You want it to be strong enough to get through some hot weather or heavy rain and not wither up at the first sign of 'less than perfect' conditions. It is the same for us in our spiritual lives.

Jesus desires that we thrive and flourish in Him! He told this parable to help us show the way we can do this. The 4 kinds of soil Jesus describes of course represents 4 different kinds of people; 4 kinds of conditions of our hearts that will determine the degree to which His truth and His word is able to take root and bear much fruit in our lives.

The starting point for any plant to thrive is to have a place for it to be planted. If the soil is too hard, like the path Jesus talked about, there is nowhere for the plant to be established and nowhere for the roots to penetrate. In our lives of faith, this looks like the truth of God's word not actually being able to get in and take root. The path represents someone who is perhaps indifferent or disinterested, or perhaps does not realise the significance and necessity to grab hold of God's truth, accept the good news of the gospel, and be changed as a result.

It's easy to come to church all our lives, be at youth group perhaps - we can have heard it all before, we can quote the right Scriptures, but still never allow the truth of God's word to penetrate our hearts, to really sink in, to really go down deep. Let me encourage you this day to open up your heart, open up God's word and allow the truth of God's word to sink in! It's so important!

Lord, thank you for your word. May my heart be soft and ready to hear and receive your word. I open up my heart and allow your truth in today! Thank you for your enabling grace. Amen

# Day 2 - How's the soil of your heart?

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Read: Mark 4:14-20  
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I've always fancied myself as a bit of a gardener - well, perhaps it's more correct to say that I've always loved being out in the garden, working away - whether I'm a good gardener or not is another question! One of the fascinating things for me is how some plants seem to grow and flourish without much effort or attention, whereas others seem to wither, despite my best efforts to help them survive. I expect that most often it is due to both conditions and the environment - where they are planted and what degree of sun, light, water, nutrients they receive. I think there is a spiritual lesson in that.

If we look deeper at this parable Jesus told about the 4 types of soil, we would do well to examine our hearts and ask 'how's the soil of our heart?' Take a moment right now and come before the Lord - think about where you are at, what the 'soil' of your heart is like. Is it like the hard path, just as we looked at yesterday, where the truth can't penetrate and take root? Is it like the shallow, rocky soil - where your roots don't go down deep and you have a shallow, surface level faith? Is it perhaps like the weedy/thorny soil, where the distractions and things of this world have pulled you away from walking closely with Jesus? Or is it like the good soil, where you are hearing the truth of God's word, receiving it gladly and having it bear much fruit for God's glory?

If you know that your heart is like one of the first three types of soil, the encouragement is that you don't have to be stuck there! The good news is that all of us can move to a point where our hearts are like the good soil that produces a good harvest - where we are firmly established and are growing and flourishing in Christ. Ask God to help you in this today!

Lord, I pray that my heart would be like the good soil. Help me to be firmly planted in You. Amen

# Day 3 - Till the soil

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Read: Mark 4:20; Philippians 3:12-14  
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When we moved into our house, the garden running down the side of our back yard was in a really bad way. It was full of weeds, rocks, and was completely overgrown. I had big plans for that garden, and if I wanted to see those plans come to fruition (a veggie and herb garden), I certainly couldn't leave it in the state it was in! It needed some work and some intentional care to bring the garden to a place where it was healthy and able to produce a harvest. Did you know that God has big plans for each of us? The thing is, He loves us too much to leave us where we are at right now. In our lives of faith, there are seasons where it is important to be intentional about 'tilling the soil' of our hearts so that we can get rid of some of the things that shouldn't be there so we can thrive and flourish in God!

We looked yesterday at the soil of our hearts, and hopefully that was an opportunity to examine where you might be at in your walk with Jesus. If you feel that the path, the rocky soil or the thorny/weedy soil best describes where you are at right now - you don't need to lose heart or become discouraged! That doesn't have to be the permanent place you are stuck in! Just as the garden at my place didn't have to remain in a state of being unable to grow anything, so your heart doesn't have to remain hard, your faith doesn't have to remain shallow, and you don't have to remain in a place where the distractions and things of this world pull you away from walking closely with Jesus.

In my garden at home, I first had to clear away the mess - the weeds, the garden waste, the rocks, the buried rubbish. I then had to till the soil - aerating it and adding good soil and nutrients, and part of this process was ensuring there was enough soil for the plants to actually have their roots go down deep. Only then did the garden have 'good soil' and was ready for things to be planted in it and grow.

# Day 3 - Till the soil

Our walks with Jesus are too important to not till the soil of our hearts! To not deal with the 'thorns and weeds' that can draw us away from Jesus! To not allow the Holy Spirit to breathe life, bring growth and bring change!

If you are discouraged about not being in the place of the 'good soil', don't wallow and stay there! Come before the Lord, ask Him for His help, lay aside the things that may be weighing you down, and look ahead, not behind, to what God has for you.

What steps can you take, starting today, to move towards cultivating 'good soil' in your heart? Is it to pray? Is it to open up God's word consistently in your life? Is it to ask God to show you the things in your life that are unhealthy distractions? Is it something else?

Let me encourage you to 'till the soil' of your heart, and allow Jesus and the word of God to shape your life!

Lord, thank you that I don't have to stay stuck in the place that I'm at. Thank you that you are at work in my heart and life to bring me to a place where I can thrive and flourish in you. Show me the steps I can take so that my heart is like good soil. Amen



# Day 4 - Grow Up!

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Read: Ephesians 4:13-16; Philipians 1:6  
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Have you ever been told to 'grow up'? Perhaps a parent, friend or teacher has said these words to you. Usually there is a negative connotation associated with this phrase when it's used to admonish someone for being silly, but do you know that God is interested in us 'growing up' and becoming more and more like Jesus? His heart is that we wouldn't just stay as immature infants in our faith.

Spiritual immaturity looks like not growing in godliness, not growing in character, not growing in how we trust the Lord, not moving beyond a shallow understanding of His word, being easily swayed and thrown off course, and ultimately, not reflecting Jesus accurately.

There is a better way! The power of the Holy Spirit will help us to 'grow up!' We also have a part to play, for as we eagerly respond to God's word, and as we intentionally follow Jesus' example in how we live, how we love and how we serve others, we will find that we are growing in maturity in our faith. We may not see progress straight away, but with God's help we will see it!

It's a little bit like looking at a photo of you from 5 years ago. Because we all look at ourselves in the mirror each day, we don't notice the change, the growth, the development in our facial features and structure. However, as you compare a photo of what you look like NOW, to what you looked like 5 years ago, you would certainly notice the change and the growth!



# Day 4 - Grow Up!

In Philippians 1:6 we read that God has begun a good work in each of our lives. That's encouraging! It also says that we can be confident (certain and sure of this fact), that not only has He begun a good work, but He will carry it through to completion.

As we continue to walk with Jesus, intentionally seeking to grow in our faith and asking for the help of the Holy Spirit, we will see the growth.

What areas of your faith do you want to grow in? Is it reading and understanding God's word? Is it prayer? Is it hearing God's voice? Bring them to God today, perhaps write them down, and pray that God would help you in those areas.

Are there things that God has highlighted in this season that you may need to let go of in order to grow and truly be strong in the Lord?

I want to encourage you - don't lose heart or be disappointed if you're not seeing the growth or progress that you would like in a particular area of your life and faith. Stay close to Jesus, and trust that He is at work, enabling us to 'grow up' and be more like Him.

Lord, thank you that you are at work in my life. Jesus, would you help me to grow to become more like you. Help me to not lose heart when I don't see the progress I would like. I trust that you are unfolding your perfect plan in my life. Help me to stay close to you. Amen

